Britain and Germany
Historical Patterns of a Relationship

by

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'The present European community would, I believe, be impossible to maintain in its present form if Germany were ever to be re-united, since in that case we would be presented with a recurrence of the historical situation which we have already experienced before 1914 and between the wars, in which the natural economic, demographic and geographical strength of Germany would be such as to threaten the European balance, and thus make the only form in which Europe might possibly unite that of a Europe under German hegemony. On the other hand, we can also speculate whether the reunification is as inevitable on historical and political grounds as most Germans have to maintain that it is. After all, the Germany the reunification of which is demanded only existed as a unified state for 75 years. Must we necessarily accept this as a fixed historical pattern to which we are bound to return?'

This opinion, expressed by James Joll, is by no means an isolated one in Britain. It addresses a central theme that in a historical as well as a contemporary perspective lies at the heart of the relationship between Britain and Germany. Germany's path to nationhood placed relations between the two countries under a great strain. The experience of two world wars remains a deep-seated trauma. Equally deep-rooted is the conviction that has grown out of this experience, namely, that the catastrophes of our century are closely related to the German *Sonderweg*. The domestic policies it produced are seen as a deviation from the ideals of Western democracy; its impact on foreign policy was to threaten, and ultimately to destroy, the balance of power in Europe.

Political developments in West Germany after the Second World War seem only to have confirmed this view in British eyes. While a unified Germany threatened, and twice shattered, world peace during its relatively short existence, the Federal Republic of Germany has proved itself a stable factor in international politics since it was established almost forty years ago.

Changes in public opinion

Today Britain and Germany are allies who are also linked by many economic, cultural and political ties, both institutionalized and informal. In both countries the general public supports this co-operation. West Germans consistently express a desire for close relations with Britain. Public opinion in Britain follows much the same lines. In 1945 few Britons would have believed that Germany would today be regarded as Britain's best friend in Europe. In polls conducted in 1983, 27 per cent of the sample liked Germans best, while only 9 per cent placed the French first. When it came to the second choice, Germans also clearly headed the list. A remarkable reversal has thus occurred in British public opinion. At the end of the Second World War, 54 per cent of Britons said that they hated the Germans, and no fewer than 80 per cent were in favour of imposing hard peace terms on Germany. The atrocities of the war, the bombing and above all the concentration and extermination camps had eliminated the last remnants of sympathy for Germany and strengthened the conviction that there was something fundamentally wrong with the Germans and their history. Radical measures seemed called for.

The Nazi dictatorship certainly kept British suspicions of Germany awake for a long time. But today a new friendship links the two countries. This makes us aware of something that was overlooked during the period of animosity: the long history of Anglo-German relations followed a predominantly harmonious course. In a historical perspective, the relatively short period of mistrust and enmity that began late and resulted in disaster is an exception rather than the rule.

Contacts during the Middle Ages

The history of mutual contacts and influence between England and Germany goes back to the early Middle Ages. At this time the English Channel was not always a barrier to

communication. After the retreat of the last Roman legions early in the fifth century Angles, Saxons and Jutes, who had occasionally attacked and raided England from northern Germany and Scandinavia, and had sometimes also served in the Roman army, gradually began to establish themselves in England. They were followed by a growing stream of settlers. The account of this step-by-step penetration of southern England given in the ninth-century *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* has, in the main, been verified by archaeological finds. The advancing Germanic tribes gradually superimposed their culture on that of the Celts, leaving lasting traces on British society, in its language and culture, administration and agricultural techniques.

Influence, however, did not flow only in one direction. Just as Continental forces shaped England, so Britain was the source of a movement that was crucial in the history of north-western Europe. This area was, in essence, Christianized from the British Isles. Christianity had taken root in Britain as early as Roman times; in the fourth century it had become established mainly in the towns and was adopted as the state religion in the year 391. However, only vestiges of Christianity survived the stormy advance of the Angles and Saxons in the fifth century. It was the work of St Patrick (died 461) in Ireland and of the monastery founded by St Columba on the tiny island of Iona in north-western Scotland that laid the foundations for the re-Christianization of Britain. This began vigorously and on a large scale when Pope Gregory the Great appointed Augustine missionary to England in 597. What Kurt Kluxen has called an 'Anglo-Saxon cultural flowering' now, in its turn, began to influence the European continent, as English, Irish and Scottish monks took their mission to the Germanic tribes.

In 695 St Willibrord went to Friesland. St Boniface in Fulda and St Kilian in Franconia stand out among the relatively small but effective group of determined missionaries who crossed the Channel and preached the Gospel to the Germanic tribes on the Continent. Charlemagne chose Alcuin of York (c. 730-804) to head the Palatine

School that he established. The missionary fervour and the erudition of the British monks helped to shape the spiritual culture of western Europe. Close religious and social contacts existed between Britain and Europe throughout the entire Middle Ages. Monks, scholars, crusaders and merchants were all part of a pan-European phenomenon that cannot be understood in terms of modern ideas of nation.

Recent research has confirmed that the Hanseatic League was of enormous significance for the economy of medieval England. Evidence exists that merchants from Friesland were operating in English markets as early as the eighth or ninth century; from the eleventh century German craftsmen settled in English towns. During the last 400 years of the Middle Ages the Hanseatic League achieved a position in England's economy unmatched by any other foreign power. Twelfth-century documents, a large number of which are extant, give a comprehensive and lively picture of the importance of German merchants, who were especially welcome in England. Initially, the grain they imported from northern Germany and the Baltic helped to stabilize the food supply in England, particularly in times of shortage due to bad harvests. German merchants owned their own warehouses for grain in the City of London. Trade carried by German ships continued until the sixteenth century. It involved mainly fish, furs, timber and other wood products, of which there was a shortage in England, where deforestation had already begun. Flax and linen were also of considerable importance. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries there was a good market for Rhenish wine in England; it shrank into insignificance only when French wine-growing regions were incorporated into the Kingdom. Trade in luxury goods, by contrast, continued to be important.

As early as the twelfth century German merchants obtained special protection from the King. With their own organization and aldermen in the City of London to represent them, they were exempted from certain duties and charges. Constant expansion in the trade with cities in

northern and western Germany, such as Dortmund, Münster and Hamburg, from the thirteenth century on allowed a Hall originally intended for merchants from Cologne to develop into the Guildhall of the Germans, which from 1380 operated its own bureau, the Stalhof. In the following centuries the influence of the Hanseatic merchants increased steadily. They dominated practically the entire trade between Britain and northern and eastern Europe and gained so many additional concessions from the Crown that they were privileged not only by comparison with other foreign competitors, but even above English merchants. The Hanseatic traders also played a crucial part in the development of the English wool industry from the late fourteenth century. Not until the late Middle Ages was England's profitable and positive connection with the German merchants soured by increasing criticism of the monopoly they exercised. Finally, they lost their privileges, and their famous bureau in London closed in 1597.

England distances itself from Europe

The English royal house of Anjou-Plantagenet (1154-1399) for some time ruled over half of France. Its territories thus included important regions of the Continent. England's last bastion in Europe was not abandoned until 1599, when Calais was lost. At this time England faced growing internal problems. The repercussions of the Reformation encouraged the Tudors' attempts to proclaim their independence from external interference and as a result they became more inward-looking. The territorial consolidation achieved by the unification of the Scottish and English thrones under one monarch in 1603 was followed in 1707 by the Act of Union, uniting both parliaments. Throughout the whole of the early modern period England, taking advantage of the protection afforded by its geographical position as an island, concentrated on developing its unique social and

governmental institutions, to a large extent independently of Continental influence. At the same time, it was also expanding overseas, laying the foundations of its colonial empire: distancing itself from Europe was an essential prerequisite for Britain's maritime power. From then on, Britain's main interest on the Continent was to maintain the balance of power in Europe in order to create the conditions necessary for its own independent existence. Thus Britain considered any country that aimed to dominate the Continent as the greatest threat: first of all, the anti-Protestant Spain of Philip II and later, absolutist and Napoleonic France.

Until well into the nineteenth century Britain regarded Germany more as a geographical than as a political unit. The colourful patchwork of small principalities and political entities of varying importance that made up Germany, held together only loosely by the Holy Roman Empire, could hardly pose a threat to the British position. Thus the image was born in England of a peaceful, rural Germany in whose small states architecture and the arts, especially painting and music, blossomed. Romanticism consolidated this image: picturesque castles, cathedrals and ruins, and the Biedermeier motifs of frustrated writers, drinking students and obsequious innkeepers are all part of the image of a pleasant, historical Germany that can still be found today in travel guides and reference books.

Natural allies

Even before the nineteenth century England had maintained a closer relationship with two German states in particular: Prussia and Hanover. As a Protestant power, Prussia under Frederick the Great ranked highly among England's 'natural allies', especially against the French threat. This confessional element played an important part in the enthusiasm for all things Prussian that gripped

England in the mid eighteenth century. Manfred Schlenke suggests that this enthusiasm revealed the importance to British political culture of securing the Protestant succession. Regarded as the only possible basis for the country's spiritual and worldly order, it was still under threat from inside and outside England in the eighteenth century. After the Glorious Revolution of 1688, securing the Protestant succession was considered essential in maintaining political culture and guaranteeing the continued existence of the established system. It is well known that Prussia rendered England useful service as an ally against Austria and France. The alliance between England and Prussia climaxed at Wellington's and Blücher's victory over Napoleon at Waterloo. Only a century later little remained of this understanding. Until then Prussia had stood for all that was good in Germany; since the beginning of our century it has been seen as the real source of the German evil.

England also had a special relationship with Hanover. George I's accession to the throne in 1714 marked the beginning of the British monarchy's close involvement with German courts, founding a long tradition of close family alliances. Although it was placed under great strain by two world wars and the Third Reich, this tradition continues to the present day. Historians are only beginning to explore the connection between England and Hanover. It raises a large number of interesting issues, above all, the complications in foreign policy and diplomacy that grew from England's rivalry with Spain and France as a maritime and trading power as well as from the existence of an English foothold on the Continent. This situation also led to political difficulties, for example, during the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years War. Hanover's function as England's 'sword on the mainland' was balanced by the permanent threat it posed to English interests as an Achilles' heel on the Continent. The union of England and Hanover under the same monarch was by no means always an advantage; it could also to a large extent curtail England's political freedom. But the Hanoverian army, kept at full strength even during peace time, gave England,

whose own standing army was as small as possible, a military force that provided support at home and abroad.

Constitutionally and administratively, too, the union of England and Hanover had unusual features: as 'kings in parliament' English kings were constitutional monarchs, while in the Electorate of Hanover they ruled as absolute princes. And they made good use of the political advantages that this situation gave them. In England the monarch's power was restricted by parliament, while in Hanover his power was practically unlimited. Monarchs therefore often preferred to conduct delicate diplomatic negotiations in Hanover, especially as there was no critical public opinion to speak of there. Although the Kingdom and the Electorate remained independent in international terms, the two territories did interact politically beyond the purely dynastic level. The Hanoverian link ensured that Britain remained involved in Continental and German affairs, whether it wanted to or not, especially in the government and administration of Hanover. Ultimate responsibility lay with the monarch in London, assisted by a special minister, who corresponded regularly with his colleagues and was normally admitted to consultations in the closet, the English monarch's inner circle. At times, a regent or viceroy was appointed specifically for Hanover. But according to the rules laid down by George I in 1714, the King/Elector always had the final say in matters of importance.

In the history of Anglo-German relations the mediating function of the Electorate of Hanover was especially significant in cultural fields. England had long maintained cultural exchanges with France and Italy; through Hanover, they were now extended to Germany. These influences can be traced in almost all the visual arts and specialized crafts, and they were especially strong in philosophy and music. The outstanding reputation of the University of Göttingen was important in this context. We must also mention the visits paid by the Hanoverian court painters Johann Georg Ziesenis and Johann Heinrich Ramberg to London. Georg Friedrich Händel was another visitor from

the Continent. In his function as *Kapellmeister*, Händel was paid from Hanoverian funds. He played an important part in making London one of Europe's leading musical centres.

Not much attention has so far been devoted to the considerable influence that England had on Hanover and the whole of Germany. The transfer of ideas in commerce, industry and technology needs further investigation, as does the whole area of intellectual exchanges. It is striking, for example, how many Fellows of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences were English. These contacts were mutually enriching, with England leading the way in the natural sciences, while Germany set the pace in philosophy and theology.

World power and nation state

Anglo-German relations assumed a different character in the nineteenth century, the age of European nationalism and industrialization. A decisive factor in this change was the difference in the positions from which Britain and Germany entered upon the modernization process in politics, society and the economy. While Britain, an established island state, proceeded to build up and consolidate its colonial empire, Germany, even after 1815, was no more than a loose confederation of independent states. At the end of the eighteenth century sweeping economic changes were starting in Britain; similar changes did not take place in Germany until more than fifty years later.

In addition to its role as a world power, Britain played a pioneering part in the Industrial Revolution. It also initiated constitutional developments that led to comprehensive electoral reforms. Germany, incomparably more backward, could not point to any similar achievements. Metternich's system, implemented after 1815, allowed Britain to turn its back on Europe to an even greater extent, while also strengthening the traditional monarchies in

Germany and impeding the emergence of nationalism there. Although Britain gradually began to break its political ties with Europe, it still protected and supported the smaller European states. Palmerston's policies, for example, encouraged liberal movements all over Europe including, in principle, Germany. When the internal and external impetus of the German unification process became apparent after the revolution of 1848-49, Britain faced a dilemma. On the one hand, it welcomed the creation of a constitutional German nation state under Prussian leadership; on the other, British politicians feared the radicalism of German republicans and the national enthusiasm of the Assembly in the Paulskirche. In their view, this Assembly lacked overview and a realistic notion of foreign policy. They thought it was likely to destroy the balance of power in Europe. At the end of April 1848 Sir Robert Peel suggested to the Prussian envoy, Bunsen, that the Germans should keep absolutely silent on all questions of European policy during the following four weeks. Peel maintained that the Germans were speaking emotionally about the future and that the British were listening with scepticism. Peel's advice was to get things moving and establish a strong, secure Germany before approaching Britain, which, they would find, would meet them half way.

The dispute about the future of Schleswig-Holstein, where the demands of the German national movement collided with British interests, shows clearly where the limits of British support lay: however much sympathy Britain felt for struggles to achieve national and political independence, it could not encourage these movements when they endangered stability and peace and threatened, by radically changing the political map, to disturb the European balance.

Coburg as an intermediary

The German cause did not lack influential advocates in Britain. In 1840 the young Queen Victoria married her cousin of the same age, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1819-1861). Through Coburg, a personal link was forged between Germany and Britain, although in the long term, family ties were not strong enough to withstand the full weight of the national antagonism that developed later.

The prince consort quickly grew into his role as private secretary and adviser to the Queen. The 1840s were years of transition in the British parliamentary system when, because of the heterogeneous political landscape, the monarchy regained considerable power as a force for integration. The extraordinarily versatile young Prince Albert, who had been well educated for his high position, was able to exercise a great deal of influence. Coming from the intellectual milieu of *Vormärz* liberalism, he was able to pass on ideas that stimulated the process of constitutional, educational and social modernization in Britain. As a German prince, Albert was extremely interested in the events of 1848, and tried to influence them in his own way. He welcomed the possibility of German unity that was appearing on the horizon, and wished Germany could experience the same conditions that his adoptive country had long enjoyed: political stability, a constitutional monarchy and national unity. Albert tried to influence the Kings of Prussia and Saxony, as well as his brother-in-law, Prince Karl von Leiningen, who held an important position in Frankfurt. The course of events in Germany strengthened Albert's conviction that Prussia had a 'German mission' to fulfil; he believed that Germany could only be unified under Prussian leadership and by excluding Austria. Albert's political activities found only limited approval in London, where they made those responsible for official foreign policy rather uneasy. The contrast between Albert's and Palmerston's views on Schleswig-Holstein was only too obvious, and not everybody shared Albert's enthusiasm for Prussia. Even after the failure of the revolution and the

onset of a period of reaction, the prince consort did not give up his hopes for Germany. But when the general political situation in Europe changed fundamentally as a result of the Crimean War Albert, too, was aware that new circumstances were arising. After Prince William of Prussia's exile in England, there was no break in Albert's friendship with him. Albert's project of a match between his favourite daughter, Victoria, and Frederick of Prussia was the trump card in a political game that he ultimately lost. If Albert had still been alive during the Prussian constitutional crisis, and if King William I had, in fact, abdicated in this situation, then nothing would have stood in the way of Frederick's early accession to the throne, and Bismarck's part in history would have been very different. As it was, however, there was no chance of Albert's hopes being realized. But was there not an inconsistency in his own plan for Germany, one that he shared, incidentally, with many German liberals before 1866? The idea of a powerful and, at the same time, liberal Prussian state was a contradiction in terms. After all, Prussia was powerful precisely because its monarchy had maintained its traditional rights in the face of constitutional demands. And it was a militarily strong Prussia that created the political conditions necessary for unification by 'revolution from above'.

Britain as a model

British political institutions and Britain's economic and social modernity were highly attractive to German liberals. Many modelled their constitutional hopes for Germany on British parliamentarism and local self-government. Among German liberals, knowledge of British procedures was assumed, even if it was often idealized and indirect. Franz Grillparzer, Heinrich Heine, Theodor Fontane and other German writers travelled widely in Britain. They took a great interest in its literature and way of life, substantially

contributing to the positive image of England that developed in Germany and never totally disappeared.

In the nineteenth century Britain was already a place of asylum for German refugees of all sorts. At the outbreak of revolution in 1848 Prince Metternich and Prince William of Prussia sought temporary refuge in Britain, which offered a haven in a sea of unrest. Unlike the Continent, it was spared political upheaval. Friedrich Engels's predictions for England, based on his knowledge of the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, remained unfulfilled. Later, Engels's friend Karl Marx, as well as Arnold Ruge, Ferdinand Freiligrath, Gottfried Kinkel and many others found a new home in Britain.

But Britons also went to Germany. In the nineteenth century the Grand Tour was part of every English gentleman's education. Apart from tourism, however, genuine artistic contacts with Germany developed, especially in the fields of music and literature. Their long-term effects are incalculable. Thus, for example, Richard Wagner's compositions aroused great interest in Britain. It is estimated that there were about 9,000 British students enrolled at German universities between 1844 and 1914.

Anglo-German rivalry

On the whole, it is true to say that during the nineteenth century German affairs were less important to Britain than British affairs were to Germany, especially in politics. Britain's growing imperial commitments made it hesitate to get too closely involved in Continental and European concerns. On the other hand, Britain's non-intervention was a condition for German unification. This was by no means an expression of British weakness; on the contrary, it was a consequence of Britain's growing international power. 'The abstention of England from any unnecessary interference in the affairs of Europe', Disraeli said in the

House of Commons in the summer of 1866, 'is the consequence not of her decline of power, but her increased strength. England is no longer a mere European power, she is the metropolis of a great maritime empire.' Britain's reluctance to be involved in Europe did not spring from political ineffectiveness, but it sometimes obscured the fact that if need be, it was ready and willing to intervene in a crisis.

While Britain's policy in Europe aimed to preserve peace and to ensure that change was brought about peacefully, Prussia under Bismarck set about thoroughly revising the map of Europe. Initially, Britain's political leaders had no objection to the advent of a new nation state in central Europe. They had long been convinced that the powerless German Confederation was no longer capable of guaranteeing the European balance. The new German nation state could check any attempt by France to upset the European equilibrium. Even from economic, demographic and geopolitical points of view, German unity was by no means as irreconcilable with British interests as, Klaus Hildebrand suggests, is often assumed today after the experience of two world wars whose origins to a large extent lay in Anglo-German antagonism. All the same, in the long term the unification of Germany under Prussian leadership was the watershed in the traditionally good relationship between Britain and Germany. It marked the start of rivalry between them.

It was not German unification as such, but the way in which it was achieved by deliberately waged wars that accounted for growing unease in Britain. Britain's attitude to the new German state, however, was at first influenced by the fact that Bismarck's policies were moderate and non-expansionist. This changed fundamentally in the 1880s when Germany – at first still under Bismarck – began to push beyond its borders, using the favourable international situation to join the scramble for colonies. Germany's new colonial and naval ventures were bound to create friction and conflicts extending beyond Europe. William II, grandson of Queen Victoria, admired his grandmother's country

and tried hard to be accepted by his English relations. But he also wanted to impress them by building a huge fleet.

But it would not be fair to attribute sole responsibility for Germany's attempt to become an international power to sections of the traditional and new industrial elites. It is part of Germany's tragedy that the liberals who worked for parliamentarism and political modernization also had unsatisfied national ambitions. They felt that Germany had to consolidate its position in central Europe and participate in international politics in order to be competitive with the other great powers. But these Germans forgot that their country's existence as a nation state not only depended on its own strength, but was also constrained by the interests of the other great powers, especially Russia and Britain. And Britain rubbed its eyes in surprise when it saw a rather kindly Continental dwarf beginning to transform itself into a giant, whose economic and political resources made it a serious, and ultimately threatening, rival.

Anti-modern feelings

The break between Britain and Germany was not inevitable. Miscalculations and the national mood were also in part responsible for the repeated failure of British and German attempts to come to terms with each other, and for the fact that the First World War became an important turning point. Towards the end of the nineteenth century widespread pro-British sentiment in Germany was replaced by strong anti-British feelings; this change was matched in Britain by an increasingly negative opinion of Prussia-Germany. Around the turn of the century Germany had outstripped Britain in the production of iron and steel, as well as chemical and electrical goods, and it became one of Britain's most important trading partners. But the antagonism between the two countries was less the result of rivalry in this field than of political differences between them, and

disparities in their national, political, industrial and social development.

In 1871 German industry lagged far behind Britain's. Unification had the effect of accelerating industrialization and in only thirty years Germany reached the level achieved by the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution as the result of a long development. Germany transformed itself into a modern industrial nation with breath-taking speed, and this had a tremendous impact on its political and social make-up, as well as on the mentality of the German people.

Large sections of the middle classes, as well as the agrarian sector, opposed the consequences of industrialization. It had destroyed their traditional models and was thus perceived as a threat. At the same time the political system could not integrate the rapidly growing working class. All social classes increasingly rejected a capitalist economy, free trade and unrestricted competition, and with them were discarded the liberal principles of a Western political culture for which Britain had provided the model. Anti-British feeling could feed on a widespread anti-modernism that built up into a general anti-Western attitude embracing the USA and France.

'Genuine German virtues', whatever they might be, were proposed as a solution to contemporary problems. Anglophobia in Germany reached a peak during the First World War and was later revived by the Nazis. As Wolfgang J. Mommsen has pointed out, it was based on 'anti-modern feelings' that sprang from the German condition and had little to do with British reality. A contemporary German scholar, Werner Sombart, denounced Britain's 'dirty flood of commercialism', and Max Scheler contrasted 'German heroism' with the 'shopkeepers' mentality of the English'. Germany's development was praised for breaking with the Western tradition and providing an alternative path that promised a rich future.

The Prussian threat

British images of Germany evoked in wartime propaganda also had little to do with German reality. Since the beginning of animosity between Britain and Germany, the unification of Germany and its anti-liberal features had increasingly been seen as evils brought about by Prussia. Prussia was regarded as the seat of the 'German disease'. The idea that the development of Prussia-Germany was an aberration was not only a response to the Nazi regime; it already existed before 1914.

During the First World War this idea established itself in British historiography as well as in public opinion. British historians renewed their efforts to discover the roots of the hostility to Western culture that was evident in Germany. They found welcome support in the ideology of the German *Sonderweg* proclaimed proudly and with anti-Western fervour by German scholars. Images of the enemy created at that time survived various modifications to remain – in some cases to the present day – at the heart of criticisms of the 'German aberration'. Prussianism, its spirit, its militarism, its *Junkers,* its industrialists, Bismarck's policies, the philosophy of German idealism and Romanticism, Luther's authoritarianism and much else came under fire. Periods of German history that only decades before were seen as particularly positive were now regarded as negative and this change was passed over in silence. The invasion of Belgium and German belligerence put an end to the Germanophile tradition in Britain. From the British point of view something had gone badly wrong in the history of Prussia-Germany. Although this image faded after 1918 and the fate of Germany's first parliamentary democracy was followed with interest and not always without sympathy, its basic features remained intact.

Hitler: the end of the German *Sonderweg*

After Hitler came to power the British government, supported by public opinion, tried to check his aggression by negotiation. This policy of appeasement, it was hoped, would avoid a war – a hope that proved illusory. But it remains to Britain's credit that, fully aware of the risk it was taking, and largely on its own, it honoured the terms of its alliance with Poland and opposed the invasion of Poland by a tremendously strong Germany.

The outbreak of the Second World War fully vindicated all suspicions of Germany. Hitler's aggression and Nazi crimes unmistakably raised the question of the expediency and legitimacy of Germany's existence as a nation state. Unlike in 1918-19, when Britain had not seriously considered partitioning Germany, this now became a real issue. The Prussian-German state had proved to be a first-class international trouble-maker and had to be radically checked. An end had to be put to Germany's *Sonderweg*, which seemed to have led to Nazism. Sir William Strang, a leading Foreign Office official, remarked that a Germany without Hitler might be less malicious, but would not necessarily be less dangerous.

It was necessary to ensure that a war would never again start on German soil. This did not seem possible without permanently depriving Germany of power. The treatment was to be radical: unconditional surrender, military occupation and Allied control. The British accepted that eastern central Europe could only be reorganized at the expense of areas that belonged to Germany and had a German population, even if this violated the right of national self-determination. If security considerations allowed plans for the dismemberment of Germany to mature, the issue of truncation grew out of Russian, Polish and Czech demands. As early as the summer of 1942 the British government in principle agreed to the transfer of German minorities from central and south eastern Europe to Germany. However, it neither laid down any precise measures, nor itself played an active part in this area. The large-scale expulsions that

began in 1945 did not, in this form, have Britain's approval. Nevertheless diplomatic protest was the limit of British objections. When assessing Britain's attitude, it should be remembered that Nazi Germany paid no heed to the right of national self-determination and the territorial integrity of other nations.

The Allies could not agree among themselves on a plan for Germany. At the end of the war the differences in the motives and aims of the anti-Hitler coalition – held together until then by a common enemy – emerged clearly in a political landscape that was changing rapidly. The Allies had agreed on the organization of the occupation, the division of Germany into zones and the setting up of Allied control, but not on a future territorial and political re-organization. The Potsdam Conference, held in the summer of 1945, did not change this situation.

The British occupation

Soviet expansion in eastern central Europe as well as the increasing difficulty of implementing a common occupation policy in Germany persuaded the Western powers soon after the Second World War that economic and political recovery in Germany – an essential precondition for European recovery – could not be achieved in co-operation with the USSR. Continuing instability in central Europe would have raised the spectre of the USSR establishing hegemony over the Continent by actively pursuing a policy of intervention based on its ideology of world revolution. Gradual obstruction of the Allied control authorities accelerated separate development in the individual occupation zones. This made it clear to America and Britain – France stood aside on this issue – that a common policy of economic and industrial recovery was absolutely indispensable for the Western zones, even at the cost of a break in the relationship between East and West.

The danger that Germany might regain a position of power was by no means considered over, and occupation and control thus continued to be necessary. But Soviet attempts to establish hegemony now gave greater cause for concern. This provided the framework within which policies for Germany were developed. In a speech to the House of Commons on 1 March 1948 Prime Minister Attlee declared that it was Britain's aim to protect itself against a possible German threat and, at the same time, to bring Germany back into the family of nations, unified on a democratic basis as Western civilization understands the term.

From 1947 Britain as well as the USA followed a policy of actively integrating the Western zones, a step dictated by economic necessity. Although Britain had emerged from the war as a victor, its domestic situation was critical, and it had lost its former position as a world power. Before the war Britain had been one of the most important creditor nations in the world; after the war it was the biggest debtor nation. Food rationing was in force in Britain and at the same time the British people, still deeply resentful of the Germans, were expected to support their former enemy in order to help those who were starving in the British occupation zone. The long-term aim was to consolidate the Western zones with American aid, even if this put an end to any hope that the victorious powers would exercise common control over Germany.

The British Control Commission for Germany, which employed almost 20,000 people, had a considerable influence on the re-establishment of democracy in West Germany. Under its control, the Germans were granted more and more independence, and local and regional administrations were built up. Democracy was practised 'from below'; step by step, responsibility was transferred to the Germans themselves. The setting up of political parties and the drawing of new *Länder* boundaries were important measures that shaped the later political structure of the Federal Republic of Germany. British re-education policy did not aim to export British institutions and ideas to

Germany, but to bring about a 'change of heart' in Germany, to inspire a spiritual and political renewal. After all, the German people could draw on a tradition of local self-government and parliamentarism that was more deeply rooted in their history than the *Führerprinzip*, and was clearly a part of Western political culture. The Westminster model, which had always been admired by German liberals and democrats, now provided an important reference point for the young West German democracy.

In Britain itself, by contrast, people continued for many years to have reservations about the Germans, although the British government actively encouraged the Federal Republic of Germany to become independent and join the Western alliance. However, the long period of enmity and the distrust that had affected the whole nation could not be swept away overnight.

Towards Europe

The governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and Britain set themselves different priorities in Europe. This imposed limits on the relationship between them. The policy of European integration followed by the Federal Republic of Germany from the 1950s was not yet at the centre of British interests. Although British politicians welcomed the agreement between France and West Germany, they did not think of themselves as having an active role in Europe. Britain still looked to its overseas commitments and its special relationship with the USA. Unifying and consolidating what was left of the Commonwealth took absolute priority. Second place was reserved for ties with the English-speaking world, and a 'united Europe', as Winston Churchill put it in 1951, took third place. Britain saw itself as standing apart, but nevertheless as Europe's closest friend and ally.

Germany hoped that Britain would become more closely involved in the process of European integration, but the time was not yet ripe for such a fundamental reorientation. Not until the mid 1950s did Britain find that its worldwide political commitments were a burden it could no longer carry. The gradual dissolution of the Empire, its restructuring into a loose association of countries, and the painful process of decolonization brought Britain into a new relationship with Europe, and thus also with its West German ally. In the Suez Crisis of 1956 Britain finally forfeited its status as a world power. This loss was signalled by the joint intervention of the USA and the USSR. The Suez Crisis also showed that it was no longer feasible for Britain to play the role of an intermediary between the USA and Western Europe. The signs of the times pointed towards Europe.

When the European Economic Community was established in March 1957 with the signing of the Treaty of Rome, Britain was not among the signatory nations and therefore did not have a chance to participate in shaping the Community's foundations. It missed perhaps the most favourable moment for entry. The British people were not able to see themselves in a European role. The glory of their former position as a world power was still too alluring to allow them to be satisfied with the limited position of a European power. But plans for an alternative European Free Trade Association proved to be impracticable. In addition, the USA under President Kennedy made it clear that it favoured an Atlantic partnership in which Western Europe spoke with one voice.

On 10 August 1961 Prime Minister Harold Macmillan applied for entry to the EEC. Whereas Franco-German relations had become closer at the end of the Adenauer era, de Gaulle now blocked all attempts by Britain to join the Common Market. Although the Federal Republic of Germany and the Benelux countries were strongly in favour of British entry, Adenauer remained unsure whether Britain really was on a pro-European course, or whether it would use membership to undermine the Community,

which was already functioning well. It was a double disappointment for Britain when the French veto seemed to coincide with the signing of a Franco-German treaty early in 1963. But the German Bundestag approved a clause in the preamble to this treaty stating that European integration could not take place without Britain.

Another ten years were to pass, however, before Britain finally became a member of the EEC. West Germany proved to be a close friend during this process. Chancellor Willy Brandt expressed this clearly during a visit to Britain in March 1970, shortly after the change of government in Bonn. Speaking to both Houses of Parliament he said that he assumed that the United Kingdom would, in the years ahead, find a place in an enlarged European Community. This Community, he suggested, would then be directly enriched by British traditions: by its historical experience of a world empire, its continuing worldwide connections, its appreciation of foreign cultures, its talent for practical politics, as well as by the inventiveness, efficiency and modernity of the British people.

The British were more pragmatic about their entry to the EEC. For them, economic reasons were the main motive for joining. It was only the international events of 1968-69 that forced Britain to think again about its changed political role. The Vietnam War occupied the USA outside Europe; the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia destroyed any remaining idea that Britain still had an independent function among the great powers. Britain's future no longer lay overseas, but with its neighbours in Western Europe. For further developments, it was decisive that the British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, overcame France's reservations and concluded an agreement with the French President, Pompidou, about the future development of Europe.

Opposition in Britain, however, had by no means been silenced. The governing Conservative Party gained the support of the House of Commons by a narrow margin of twenty-eight votes. When the Labour Party came to power in 1974 Britain's entry to the Common Market was put into doubt again. This vacillation finally came to an end in June

1975 when a referendum was held, a most unusual step in British politics. An astonishingly high 67.2 per cent of voters were in favour of joining the EEC.

This raised hopes, especially in Germany, that political integration would now proceed more quickly, but they proved to be too optimistic. For Britain, the EEC remained primarily a common market. And in economic terms, British hopes were not fulfilled. British claims to exclusive fishing rights in a zone extending 200 miles from its coastline are one example of the difficulties facing economic integration. The financing of the EEC also proved to be a constant point of conflict. Like the Federal Republic of Germany, Britain is a net contributor, because it has to pay into the Community's budget foreign duties it levies on trade with the Commonwealth. No wonder that British interest in Europe waned. In 1979 and 1984 the turn-out for elections to the European Parliament was only 32 per cent. Nevertheless, Britain's entry into Europe has already created realities that cannot be reversed. It cannot be denied that Britain's tenacity in pursuing its own interests often annoys its partners in Europe. But Britain has also contributed to the sober political achievement represented by real European co-operation.

From mistrust to partnership

Controversies between EEC partners should not distract from the remarkable progress that has been made in bilateral relations between the peoples and governments of Britain and Germany. Varied and close relations exist at all levels of economic, cultural, scientific and political life.

Today the Federal Republic of Germany is Britain's most important supplier, and as a trading partner it is not far behind the USA. Britain and Germany share a number of projects in the aerospace industry and advanced technology, such as the Airbus and fast breeder reactors. Britain is

the largest supplier of oil to the Federal Republic of Germany, having overtaken even Saudi Arabia. All the same, since the 1960s British industry has clearly fallen behind West Germany's, and this industrial decline has produced considerable social tensions in Britain. Britain's system of industrial relations combined with fragmented trades unions has made labour disputes more common in Britain than in Germany. Although Britain may be experiencing some of the problems of industrial society in a more extreme form than Germany at present, both countries will have to face these problems in the future.

The Second World War practically halted cultural contacts between Britain and Germany. Until the late 1950s it was difficult to overcome British reservations about German culture. However, these have all but disappeared now.

The partnership between Britain and Germany may seem absolutely self-evident to us today, but the reservations that had developed throughout history were not overcome at a single stroke. 'Germany and Britain started this century in discord, we enter its last quarter in total trust', said the Foreign Secretary, Sir Alex Douglas-Home, in October 1971, on the occasion of a visit by the then President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Gustav Heinemann. After Hitler's terrible war, the British people certainly found this trusting relationship more difficult than the 'unconditionally defeated' Germans. But the broad dialogue that started in the post-war years, ranging from student exchanges to the conferences and meetings of MPs at Wilton Park and Königswinter, has helped to promote mutual understanding and to allow a lasting partnership to be established. This goes back to the old historical relationship between the two countries, showing that Hitler is not the only product of German history, and that the two countries are linked by a common tie deeply rooted in Western culture that transcends the concept of nationality.

Britain was one of the most influential forces present at the birth of the Federal Republic of Germany. America and Britain played a crucial part in the founding of a Western

state and its integration into the Western alliance. They convinced hesitant West Germans that to hold on to hopes for a unified Germany would jeopardize their opportunity to establish a liberal, democratic state for a large proportion of the German population. At the same time, they supported the demand for re-unification in freedom – with the additional motive, to be sure, of not being outdone by the Soviet Union's declaration regarding unity. They respected the Germans' right of self-determination, but always saw it in the context of security considerations. The First World War had already shown them how difficult it was to maintain European security with a German nation state in central Europe. The disaster inflicted upon Europe by Nazi Germany has ensured that none of its neighbours can have any interest in re-establishing the German nation as an independent centre of action in central Europe. The legitimate desire of the Germans for national unity is therefore subject to this reservation. Germany must remain predictable. From the British point of view, a commitment to the Western alliance in both foreign and domestic policy guarantees this. The Western alliance thus remains an indispensable precondition for continuing friendship between Germany and Britain. Their common historical roots show that these two countries are relations, not enemies.

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